

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: March 10, 2016

Agenda Item: Tiger Ridge Conservation Easement (R6)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background:

FWP proposes to pursue the purchase of a perpetual conservation easement on approximately 12,300 acres of deeded land in Choteau and Blaine counties. The property, referred to as Tiger Ridge, is located in the southern foothills of the Bears Paw Mountains along Little Birch Creek. The property consists of two separate parcels 8 miles apart. The larger parcel is approximately 10,500 acres and the smaller parcel is approximately 1,800 acres. This ranch also leases 1,120 acres of public land (DNRC and BLM) and is adjacent to several thousand more acres of public land.

The ranch provides winter range for elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope. It consists primarily of native prairie grassland, sagebrush steppe, and prairie forest habitats. The entire property is located within general sage-grouse habitat and there are several active sage-grouse leks within 4 miles of the property.

A conservation easement on the property will enhance and conserve a large tract of native habitat for the benefit of wildlife, while maintaining the traditional ranching and agricultural values of this property. An easement would also protect and expand recreational opportunities in this region.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: FWP personnel would proceed with analysis and negotiations for the purchase of a perpetual conservation easement on the Tiger Ridge Ranch property. FWP would work with the landowner to develop a management plan including a rest-rotation grazing system for the property.

No Action Alternative: FWP would forgo the opportunity to pursue an easement with this landowner. There would be no permanent protection of these native habitats or guarantee of future public access for recreation.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

The Department recommends endorsement by the Commission, which would allow FWP to proceed further with landowner negotiations and to conduct necessary analyses and public review processes. This would ensure these properties continue to provide high value habitat and public recreational opportunities.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Commission endorse the Tiger Ridge Conservation Easement project, allowing the department to proceed with further work on this project.